

Department of Human Services

Articles in Today's Clips Friday, February 8, 2008

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Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



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Michigan Report

February 7, 2008

DAY CARE, F.I.P. WINNERS IN D.H.S. BUDGET

The Family Independence Program would get its first grant increase since 1990 and hourly day care reimbursement rates would be infused with an additional \$10 million under the executive budget recommendation for the Department of Human Services.

Overall, the budget totals \$4.7 billion, with \$1.4 billion coming from the general fund, which represents a 1.9 percent increase in gross spending and 5.3 percent hike in general fund appropriations relative to current year expenditures.

The Family Independence Program would be funded to cover 77,000 cases, including 150,000 children, with the governor's proposed \$396.4 million appropriation. Caseloads have dropped to their lowest numbers in five years from 88,000.

At a cost of \$12 million, the program contains a 2 percent grant increase, or \$3 per person per month, the first in nearly two decades. That would mean a parent with two kids would receive \$498 a month instead of \$489.

In a briefing with reporters after the presentation, State Budget Director Bob Emerson, noting the length of time since an increase, said that the clients are doing "everything we ask. We control their lives" and that the caseload drop is due in part to new strict standards to qualify for benefits.

"I thought it is the least we can do," he said, adding almost nobody objected to it when he briefed the Senate Republicans.

During the budget presentation, [Rep. Dudley Spade](#) (D-Franklin Twp.), chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services, asked Mr. Emerson whether the administration will have a method for distributing additional money to day care operators because he's been told there are some inequities in the system. But Mr. Emerson said while there is no formula, with the House adding \$10 million to day care services in a 2007-08 supplemental, the administration's recommendation builds on that.

In her budget, [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) also increases the children's clothing allowance, which would provide \$75 per child each year instead of \$43.

Mr. Emerson also said the budget includes rate increases for private child placing agencies. And appropriations for the State Disability Assistance program, which covers 11,500 disabled adults, would see a \$5 per month grant increase under the \$39 million program appropriation.

Other highlights of the DHS budget:

- \$21.8 million for the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program so that FIP recipients receive training services and better their chances at employment.
- \$1.2 billion in federal monies for food assistance for more than 571,000 low-income households.
- \$200 million in combined state and federal funds to pay for the home heating credit, energy-related crisis payments and weatherization products for low-income residents.
- \$16.8 million in spending for the child welfare system. That is on top of the \$40 million funded for the system in 2007-08.
- \$210.4 million for the Children's Foster Care program, which provides care and supervises more than 9,500 children.
- \$54.8 million for family preservation services.
- \$242.3 million in subsidies for 28,800 adopted children.
- \$291.6 million for Juvenile Justice Services, which includes \$226.8 million in Child Care Fund reimbursement for locals.
- \$264.9 million for the state's child support program, including \$50 million for automation of the child support system.

The basic public assistance allowance grant increase is "long awaited," and welcomed, but "we hope it's understood that this is a small increase in a program that has dramatically eroded over the years in meeting the needs of children and their families," said Ann Marston, president of the Michigan League for Human Services.

The group argues the purchasing power of the grant has deteriorated, buying less than 75 cents on the dollar for what it got in Wayne County in 1993. Also, the grant does not cover most apartment rents in Michigan, the League stated. And with the increase, the grant is still 64 percent below the federal poverty level for a family of three.

MLHS praised the governor for restoring the clothing grant to low-income children, which had been cut to \$25 in 2002 and restricted to school-aged children.

The new grant amount will pay for a pair or two of jeans, tennis shoes, underwear, a few t-shirts or tops, khaki slacks or a dress at a discount store and maybe a used coat, the group estimates.

"Anyone who has ever had a child knows how quickly \$75 will disappear as children grow," said Sharon Parks, vice president for policy. "It's very much needed because the current level of assistance to very low-income families means there isn't a penny to spare for such necessities. It all goes to the rising costs of rent, utilities and food."

Jack Kresnak, president of Michigan's Children, credited the governor for making several enhancements to the budget and said he is hopeful the Legislature agrees with her. With the state's tough economic situation, Mr. Kresnak said he is happy to not see major cuts to programs.

Increasing funds for family preservation and abuse and neglect prevention programs is key to providing children with a stable home life, but Mr. Kresnak did note that funding is still down 12 percent from what it was in 2001.

With the state facing a lawsuit for many of its services within DHS, Mr. Kresnak said it's important for the Legislature to provide enough funding to implement necessary reforms. While the group needs more details of the budget, Mr. Kresnak said the administration wanting to increase the number of foster care workers is a step in that direction. He also complimented the governor on increasing the clothing allowance.



MICHIGAN REPORT

The Capitol Record Since 1906

REPORT NO. 26, VOLUME 47-- THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7 2008

LOW-KEY BUDGET PRESENTATION MIRRORS RESTRAINED BUDGET

A restrained 2008-09 budget proposal that still makes some key additions in areas such as education, job training and social services, went before lawmakers from [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) on Thursday and for the first time in several years the administration's proposal was not greeted with outright hostility.

Which is not to say that lawmakers were all pleased with the \$9.86 billion general fund (\$44.03 billion in total spending) proposal. But following the trench warfare that marked 2007 as lawmakers and the administration ground through on their way to tax increases and the 2007-08 budget (a siege that effectively began with the budget presentation made in February 2007), lawmakers seemed satisfied that the budget did not act as the opening salvo to new conflict.

In her [message](#) to the Legislature that accompanied the budget, Ms. Granholm said the budget continues the state's efforts to reform government and invest in education and other services "that make us competitive as a state."

And in comments to reporters, Ms. Granholm said the budget was an attempt to deal with issues that were important to both Democrats and Republicans and to tone down the controversy that had marked budgets in previous years. "This budget, of all the budgets I've had the privilege of proposing as governor, this budget is the best," Ms. Granholm said. "It is structurally sound, it has no new taxes, no new fees and invests in the things citizens value."

"I wrote this in the spirit of collaboration and cooperation. That's why it contains things both parties want to see and I hope it gets a receptive response in the Legislature," Ms. Granholm said.

Perhaps nothing more clearly demonstrated that shift in attitude than the administration's decision to drop what has become its annual fight over eliminating the tuition grants, which are geared towards students attending

private colleges. In the past, Ms. Granholm had said the grants were not needed since most of the students attending private colleges in the state came from upper-income households.

At least two different Republican lawmakers asked Budget Director Bob Emerson during his presentation if there were no cuts in the tuition grants and expressed their gratitude when he assured them there were not.

Thanks in large measure to the tax increases along with spending restraints and an unexpected surplus from the conclusion of the 2006-07 budget, Mr. Emerson told the joint meeting of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees that the proposed budget had made a major step towards eliminating and controlling the state's structural deficit.

This budget did not include any call for tax increases either directly or by closing loopholes. It did not call for fee increases. Most of the one-time revenue in the budget will come from refinancing current debt, and Treasurer Robert Kleine told the committees that except for refinancing of some tobacco securitization bonds the refinancings should not extend the length of the state's total debt.

"This such a contrast to last year and the last six years," said [Sen. Michael Switalski](#) (D-Roseville), the Democratic vice-chair on the Senate Appropriations Committee. "We're not trying to paper over shortages, or use one-time money. It's right in the ballpark and actually able to add some modest increases for some programs that haven't seen them in years." Senate Appropriations Chair [Sen. Ron Jelinek](#) (R-Three Oaks) said the state "is certainly in a better position to get our budget balanced in a more appropriate time." (Both the Senate and House Appropriations Committees have called for the budget to be completed in June. In contrast, the current budget was finished at the end of October, at the end of a 30-day continuation budget because the spending plan was not completed by the September 30 end of the fiscal year.)

Where in the past, Republicans may have labeled some elements of the budget dead on arrival, Mr. Jelinek said there was nothing like that in the current budget proposal.

House Appropriations Committee Chair [Rep. George Cushingberry Jr.](#) (D-Detroit) said he was proud the governor had the courage to do what hasn't been done for 18 years and propose an increase in public assistance grants, because "the people at the bottom need an increase."

He also complimented Ms. Granholm on providing a real economic stimulus package in advancing a \$1.8 billion proposal for capital outlay at state universities, parks, buildings, military training facilities and airports, along with transportation projects. Mr. Cushingberry argued the federal stimulus

package also should target investment into infrastructure or efforts to drive down gas prices, instead of just sending out checks to people who will likely use it to pay off their debt, since as a nation personal debt has grown over the past several years.

Mr. Cushingberry said he also has concerns the federal budget contains cuts to Medicaid, including reductions to hospital and doctor payments and funding to states for the program.

"If they follow through with cuts to Medicaid we won't be looking at a surplus," he argued, adding that while he was glad to see the country realize everyone is in a recession, not just Michigan, "If the national scene goes the wrong way we will be back here again talking about further deficits."

But the top Republican on the House panel, [Rep. Dan Acciavatti](#) (R-Chesterfield), said the state is going to face problems down the road simply because the governor's 2009 proposal uses one-time revenues, does not include much in terms of structural changes to government that will save money down the road and because the state faces more spending pressures in 2010 and beyond.

"Will this budget put Michigan in the right position? That's the first question I'm struggling with. I don't think it does," he said.

And he argued Mr. Cushingberry's recession comment was wrong: Michigan is facing a unique situation of job and population loss that is contributing to its struggles and having a competitive tax and regulatory structure is important.

However, Mr. Acciavatti extended an olive branch to Democrats, saying that he believed there would be time for more discussions on how to move the state forward.

There would be questions and changes made to the budget and Mr. Emerson said the administration expected that as the budget moved forward.

In the presentation, among the first concerns raised on the proposal were on the state pre-funding retiree health care costs, the allocation of revenue sharing increases, how Ms. Granholm's proposal for smaller high schools was being funded and whether it was ignoring smaller school districts, and whether the administration was walking away from an agreement to help control costs for families trying to communicate with family members in prison.

Legislators were told to ask questions of Mr. Emerson and not make statements. Mr. Jelinek was asked if that was in keeping with the move towards greater bipartisanship and he said no, he wanted to avoid a "four-hour diatribe."

The budget with federal funds, School Aid Funds, restricted funds and the general fund totals \$44.032 billion, about \$1 billion more than the current fiscal year. That proposed expenditure total is also \$664 million less than the total of all revenues available to the state.

The \$100 million contribution to the Budget Stabilization Fund that the budget proposes is the first in five years, Mr. Emerson said. He told committee members that it would not help prevent future budgetary problems and that a quick examination of Michigan's history would show that. There was \$1.2 billion in the BSF during the last years of former Governor John Engler's administration and the state spent it all in the last 18 months of that administration as the state went into its long-term fiscal problems.

Ms. Granholm said the budget does help prepare the state for future lean budget years and the potential of a national recession through such things as the rainy day fund deposit and concessions from state employees, which works to cut government costs over several years.

"We're not out of the soup yet because we have the potential of a national recession," she said.

Asked what reforms the budget includes, Mr. Emerson said the administration considered the cuts state workers were willing to absorb as a significant reform. As part of the newest contract state workers are paying more of their health insurance costs and going without a pay raise this year. Beginning with the 2009-10 fiscal year, state workers will receive a 1 percent pay increase.

The governor said the \$235 million in cuts claimed in the new budget are due primarily to employee concessions and proposed corrections changes. The budget does not reflect the selling of any state assets - privatizing the Lottery has been a favorite topic of some legislators - but Ms. Granholm said she is open to a variety of public-private partnerships. The Lottery is not a likely candidate, she noted, because of constitutional hurdles and its commitment to help pay for K-12 schools.

And asked why the state had not included funding for the future cost of state worker retiree health care benefits, Mr. Emerson said to do so would have cost the state an additional \$200 million to \$300 million. If the Legislature wanted to raise that money, the administration would be glad to work with them, he said, otherwise the state was going to continue with its pay as it goes system.

Senate [Majority Leader Mike Bishop](#) (R-Rochester), while praising the overall tone of the budget, still questioned the administration's use of "new programs and experimental initiatives." The state should cut back on

spending and focus efforts more on overall incentives to the business community.

House [Minority Leader Craig DeRoche](#) (R-Novi) delivered the most critical comments on the budget, saying that once again Ms. Granholm had delivered a budget that was "long on rhetoric and short on substance." The budget fails to attack the state's structural deficit, he said, setting the stage for another potential crisis in 2010.

But Senate [Minority Leader Mark Schauer](#) (D-Battle Creek) praised the budget as setting the right tone for the state to build its economy while providing protections for needed services.

In the general fund budget, which is down .1 percent overall, the changes in department spending range from a high of 105.1 percent in the Department of Labor and Economic Growth, benefiting from the No Worker Left Behind Program, to a cut of 6.6 percent in the Department of State.

Here is a [breakdown](#) of all the budget lines, compared to current-year spending both for general funds and total spending. Although the chart shows a decrease in community college and university spending, the 2007-08 numbers include repayments to those institutions that had been held back in the prior year as a budget-balancing move.

Balanced, lean and realistic

February 8, 2008

Compared to the thunderclouds that gathered over many of her previous budget proposals, Gov. Jennifer Granholm's spending plan for the next fiscal year is a sunny day at the beach. That's a big plus during Michigan's ongoing economic storm.

Granholm has put together a rational budget that still shows many signs of scrimping but appears to be structurally sound. In sum, it is essentially unchanged from the current year's budget at \$9.8 billion for the general fund. The school aid fund is up slightly.

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Having a new income tax rate plus a surcharge on the Michigan Business Tax helps a lot. After the uproar over getting those taxes in place last year, it's a relief to hear Granholm pledge that no such requests, and ensuing showdowns, are in the works for fiscal 2008-09.

Budget dustups, if any, are more likely to occur over how to divvy up spending within categories, such as for school and university payments.

For K-12 schools, Granholm would allot from \$108 to \$216 more per pupil. The highest amount, which represents a 3% increase in per-pupil spending, would go only to districts that now get the smallest foundation grants. More schools are likely to hit the average boost of 2.6%, and schools with the highest spending rates are guaranteed only the minimum dollar amount. This is an admirable effort to keep working toward statewide equity, but all schools have had rough times in recent years, and it's worth exploring whether there's a way to get more money for all.

Similarly, Granholm has requested incentives for university funding that may set off acrimony. The 15 universities' payments would rise 3% on average, but the rates individually would range from 2.3% to 6.2%.

Granholm deserves applause for eking out small gains in other areas, which lawmakers ought to accept:

- A 2% increase in welfare grants. That works out to an extra \$3 a month, hardly a windfall considering the rate last went up in 1990.
- Restoration of the full \$75 annual grant for clothing for low-income children, now cut to \$43.
- Increased preschool programs to serve 7,000 more low-income children.
- \$3.5 million to pilot five mental health courts, which could lead to savings in prison costs and better treatment for the mentally ill.

Still, this remains a very lean budget, and lawmakers and some groups may resist some of the cost-cutting. Granholm also took a pass on major areas that cry out for reform, such as retiree health care, as other groups explore the issue.

The governor also is promoting her economic stimulus plan, which is separate from the budget because it employs onetime money from bond sales and refinancing, devoted to onetime measures that spur jobs.

Michigan surely needs that effort, but the work to boost education and cut the cost of government remains equally essential.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Don't let budget problems hurt foster care kids

Friday, February 08, 2008

It is no secret that Michigan's state budget problems have forced repeated budget cuts over the years. It has forced state officials to find other ways to provide services and to decide whether to end some services entirely. That's not all bad.

But, no matter the circumstances, the state's budget woes should never endanger the most vulnerable among us, the children.

This week, a court-ordered study of Michigan's foster care system discovered some egregious lapses in the monitoring of cases.

The study, ordered by U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmonds and conducted by the non-profit Children's Research Center in Madison, Wis., collected information from 460 cases around the state, including Kalamazoo County.

It discovered:

v Caseworkers failed to make mandated visits to foster children within 30 days of placement in 76 percent of the cases examined;

v Caseworkers failed to do follow-up visits after 30 days in over 30 percent of the cases;

v In 35 percent of the cases in which children were placed with relatives, the state failed to do criminal or child abuse records checks;

v In 22 percent of the cases studied, children did not receive at least one medical exam.

Because of deficiencies in Michigan's foster care system, which now has about 19,000 children, the state is being sued by Children's Rights, a national child advocacy group that alleges the state's foster care system is harming children.

After the suit was filed in August 2006, state officials indicated they wanted to settle. But then it became apparent the state had no money to improve the system and settlement talks ended last year. The study was conducted between September and December 2007. A trial is scheduled for June.

The situation is inexcusable.

We believe the Granholm administration and the Legislature recognize this. Lawmakers authorized funding in the 2008 budget for 300 new children's services positions.

It appears that this addition of children's services workers would improve services to children in foster care in Michigan. But state officials need to make sure that is the case.

The state's young wards deserve protection, stability, access to health care and education.

The courts and children's advocates must continue to monitor the state's foster care system until these problems are resolved.



Friday, February 8, 2008

Detroit

7-year old 'hero' returns home

Alexis Goggins, who was shot six times while trying to protect her mother, has been released from hospital.

Delores Flynn / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Seven-year-old Alexis Goggins, who was shot six times trying to defend her mother, is back with her family.

She was released from Children's Hospital late Wednesday, her cousin Tonya Colbert said. Colbert declined to comment more on Alexis' condition and return home.

On Dec. 2, Alexis' mother, Seliethia Parker, 30, was held at gunpoint by former boyfriend Calvin Tillie shortly after midnight at a gas station on Seven Mile. Alexis threw herself in the path of Tillie's 9 mm gun. Alexis, who lost her right eye and has undergone multiple surgeries, was hailed as a hero. The family's ordeal began when their furnace went out at their home on the city's east side. Parker called her friend Aisha Ford who picked them up. As Parker and Alexis were getting into Ford's SUV, Tillie appeared and forced them into the vehicle, police said.

Tillie, 29, ordered Ford to drive him to an address on Six Mile, police said. Instead, she drove to a gas station on Seven Mile. Ford called 911 while inside the station paying for gas. When she went back into the station a second time the attendant noticed her crying, asked what was wrong and then called police as they heard shots coming from the vehicle.

The city has launched an investigation into the operator who took the second call for her "demeanor," after 911 recordings, obtained by The Detroit News through the Freedom of Information Act, showed a more than 3-minute gap between the first call for help and when a police officer was dispatched. A city spokesman said there was no delay, but a review of transcripts shows that if an officer had been sent sooner, one might have arrived before the shooting.

Police said Alexis jumped from the back seat shielding her mother saying, "Don't shoot my mommy" while Tillie fired six more rounds hitting the first-grader in the left temple, chin, cheek, right eye and right arm.

Tillie is set to undergo an examination for mental competency in 36th District Court on Feb. 14.

You can reach Delores Flynn at (248) 647-7225 or dflynn@detnews.com.

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Foundation gives \$10,000 for home heating assistance

POSTED: February 8, 2008

ESCANABA — The Community Action Agency has received a \$10,000 emergency grant from the Community Foundation for Delta County. The funds will be used to help low-income residents with their home heating costs.

Earlier this week, CAA announced it was temporarily suspending heating assistance because of a lack of funds.

"Our committee was overwhelmingly in favor of making this grant," said William W. Lake Jr., chair of the Community Foundation's Grants Committee. "The Community Foundation's mission is 'to better the lives of residents both now and in the future.' We know there is a great need for this type of assistance in the community and we're happy to help fill that need."

Bonnie Wenick-Kutz, the foundation's first vice chair, said the foundation saw the need and took immediate action to provide temporary relief for those in need of help with heating their homes. "Without question this will be one of the very best grants we could make," she said.

"Our agency is extremely pleased that the Community Foundation for Delta County has responded so positively and quickly to an emergency situation where people would have to endure very cold weather and in some cases actually run out of heat for their homes," said Cathy Pearson of the CAA. "We are grateful that our community is made up of such a caring organization."

The CAA "Walk for Warmth" is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 23. All funds raised will be used directly for services to Delta County residents.

"We are hoping that even though money is tighter for many in our community, individuals, businesses and organizations will be able to contribute again," Pearson said. She also stressed that every dollar is used for direct assistance with no administrative overhead.

Registration will begin at 9 a.m. at the Elks Lodge 354, 510 Ludington St., Escanaba. Pledge sheets may be turned in between 9 and 10 a.m. at the Elks Lodge, and the walk will begin promptly at 10 a.m. Walkers are responsible for collecting all pledges. The walk route will begin at the Elks Lodge and proceed down Ludington Street to 14th Street and back.

For more information, contact Pearson at 786-7080.

"As always, we encourage school and organizations to participate and carry their banner," Pearson said.

Article Photos



Gerri Nelson of DTE Energy, left, Dave Elmblad, of the Department of Human Services and Sarah Cartwright of the Community Action Agency serve bratwursts Thursday during the annual Walk for Warmth bratwurst sale fundraiser in Escanaba. This year marked the first time the event sold out, cutting off sales 45 minutes earlier than planned. Over \$1,900 was raised, the most ever for the brat sale, CAA officials said. (Daily Press photo by Nicole Gearhart)

The Rusty Rail will once again be hosting the Ride for Warmth later in the day on Saturday, Feb. 23. For more information or to register call the Rusty Rail at 384-0111.

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Poverty forum set for Feb. 12 in Detroit

February 8, 2008

By BOWDEYA TWEH

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A state commission will hold a forum Feb. 12 in Detroit to hear concerns and stories from people who are living in poverty or economic difficulty.

The forum is being hosted by the Michigan Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Central United Methodist Church, 23 E. Adams Ave.

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The purpose of the commission is to “reduce the causes, conditions, and effects of poverty and promote social and economic opportunities that foster self-sufficiency for low income persons,” according to the state’s Department of Human Services’ Web site.

The commission is also hosting a Feb. 19 seminar in Flint to address the same issues. Previous forums visited Sault Ste. Marie, Waterford, Kalamazoo and Big Rapids.

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— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Human services group recognizes bank manager

Friday, February 08, 2008

BY LISA CAROLIN

The Livingston Community News

Vicki Hartman, vice president and branch manager of the National City Bank in downtown Howell, has been honored by the Livingston County Human Services Collaborative Body.

Alissa Parks, collaborative community planner for the Livingston County Human Services Collaborative Body, which had its annual awards meeting in January, said that during Hartman's 20-year career as a banker, she has always pitched in to help bring about positive change in the community, and has consistently provided leadership and response to community needs.

Hartman serves in a variety of roles, including as secretary for the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce board and as a member of its executive committee. She's on the Livingston County Catholic Social Services board of directors, the Livingston County Diversity Council board of directors, chairperson for the Main Street Development board, and a member of the Howell Downtown Development Authority. She also was recognized for her volunteer efforts with the Big Brothers Big Sisters Lunch Buddy Program and the Michigan Scholars Program, and for developing the Credit Analysis and Reconstruction Effort financial literacy workshops for local parolees.

Also recognized was the Housing, Growth and Opportunities Committee, a group that advocates for affordable housing in Livingston County. It is made up of 20 individuals representing local banks, chambers of commerce, human service agencies and building companies, with the goal of enabling initiatives toward providing more affordable housing in Livingston County.

This spring, building is scheduled to get under way on a single-family house on North Street in Howell, which will be for a low-income family in Livingston County. It will be built on abandoned vacant property that was revitalized last year thanks to the efforts of the Housing, Growth and Opportunities Committee.

Lisa Carolin can be reached at lcarolin@livingstoncommunitynews.com or at 810-844-2010.

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Pay raises given to suspended employee

By VICTOR SKINNER
vskinner@record-eagle.com

BEULAH -- The state paid one of its Benzie County-based employees more than \$54,000 in wages and benefits -- including two pay raises -- during the worker's nearly 16-month suspension amid an internal probe that ended in her termination.

Michigan Department of Human Services officials fired Interlochen resident Elaine Saffron on Feb. 1 for numerous "work rule" violations. Saffron previously avoided criminal charges when Benzie County Prosecutor Anthony Cicchelli in July dropped two misdemeanor theft charges against her for allegedly stealing a laptop computer from the county's government center, where she worked.

The theft counts against her followed sheriff's department and state police investigations into a web of embezzlement at the center that also involved county employees. The probe led to the discovery that county workers had transformed a maintenance shed into a clubhouse that included a tanning bed, pornography and various pieces of drug paraphernalia.

That investigation concluded more than a year ago, in January 2007, Benzie Undersheriff Rory Heckman said.

Saffron, 49, was on paid administrative leave from Nov. 13, 2006, until last week, during which time DHS officials paid her \$54,700 in wages and benefits and bumped her hourly pay rate from \$18.66 to \$19.41 per hour, said Maureen Sorbet, DHS spokeswoman.

"Those are the regular increases all state employees receive," Sorbet said.

State officials cited the following in Saffron's termination: violation of state Internet and e-mail policy; failure to work cooperatively and treat others with courtesy and respect; improper release of confidential information; and conduct unbecoming of a state employee, Sorbet said.

She said the internal probe languished as the criminal case against Saffron dragged.

"We delayed our investigation until the criminal investigation concluded. It was a multi-jurisdictional investigation with complex evidence which took time to adequately review," she said. "It takes some time to do a thorough investigation of the situation. I don't have all of those details."

Cicchelli said he didn't prosecute Saffron because he contended the case rested on allegations made by her estranged husband, whom he did not consider a credible witness.

Elaine Saffron did not return messages seeking comment.

In January, Beulah resident Eric VanDussen filed suit against the director of DHS after the agency allegedly refused to properly release all documents and communications about its investigation into Saffron.

DHS has yet to respond to VanDussen's Freedom of Information Act lawsuit. He said Saffron's termination doesn't change his stance.

Pay raises given to suspended employee

"I want the documents and I want them to ... acknowledge that they unlawfully withheld them," VanDussen said. "DHS has caused the newsworthiness of these documents to irreparably dwindle" by delaying their release. I am looking to find out the inner workings of how their internal investigation was conducted and why it took so long for it to come to this resolution.

"They've had all the information they needed even before the criminal charges were dismissed in July," he said.

Sorbet said DHS has been served with the lawsuit, but she was unsure when the department would reply.

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Photos



Elaine Saffron

Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Daniel Piepszowski (313) 689-0171

Michigan Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity

Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Michigan Department of Human Services

**Poverty forums upcoming in Detroit and Flint;
Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity hold events that, in part, lead to upcoming poverty summit**

Feb. 8, 2008

Michigan Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity will hold

forums in Detroit and Flint in February to hear directly from Michigan individuals and families who are living in poverty. They are part of a series of six forums to be held across the state that will lead to Michigan's first poverty summit in November 2008. The forums will be held:

--Tuesday, Feb. 12 from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at Central United Methodist Church, 23 East Adams in Detroit.

--Tuesday, Feb. 19 from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at Genesee County Community Action, 601 N. Saginaw St., Flint.

Previous forums were held in December in Sault Ste. Marie, Kalamazoo, Big Rapids and Waterford. The sponsoring state commission was established by Gov. Jennifer Granholm in 2003 and is charged with advancing state policies

and programs to reduce poverty and to address the needs and concerns of low-income people.

The forums provide a vehicle for people living in poverty to share their stories and life experiences as they pursue economic self-sufficiency. The commission hopes to gain first hand knowledge of what families and individuals face when accessing public and private support systems.

"We want to find out what works at the grass-roots level, what programs are innovative in helping people move out of poverty." commission chairperson Sonia Harb said. "We think it is vitally important that we hear the stories and experiences of people who deal with poverty every day as part of this process."

The commission is supported by the Department of Human Services' Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity.

"Poverty has quietly become the most important question of our time," said Ismael Ahmed, director of Michigan Department of Human Services.

"Almost two million people live in or near poverty in Michigan including almost a half-million children. Almost three million residents live in low-income status.

"This is an issue nationwide, not just in Michigan, and it has special meaning here with the ongoing weakness of our state economy."

The commission is working in a state-wide partnership with the Michigan League for Human Services, a Lansing-based non-profit organization dedicated to education, research and advocacy for the benefit of low-income and other vulnerable citizens. The Michigan Community Action Agency Association, a membership organization for the 30 community action agencies that provide human service programs in all 83 counties, is the other principal partner.

The commission is also working with local organizations and coalitions including the Kalamazoo Poverty Reduction Initiative led by the Kalamazoo

Chamber of Commerce. In addition to hearing testimony from consumers of state welfare programs, the commission is encouraging local service organizations to provide details of innovative programming that has resulted in positive outcomes for the poor.

For more information contact commission member Daniel Piepszowski at 313-689-0171.